DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 081 062 EA 005 134

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TITLE A School Without Failure: A Description of the Glasser Approach in the Palo Alto Unified School District.
PUB DATE Mar 73
NOTE 32p.; Paper presented at American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting (58th, New Orleans, Louisiana, February 25-March 1, 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Failure; *Educational Change; *Elementary Schools; Grading; *Humanization; *Individualized Instruction
IDENTIFIERS *Schools Without Failure

ABSTRACT

Glasser builds his alternative, a "School Without Failure," on an analysis of what children need to achieve a successful identity and on an examination of the ways in which schools affect children to teach them failure. The author discusses the Glasser approach and describes an attempt to implement the approach in a Palo Alto elementary school. The author observes that, after four years of operating on the Glasser plan, the school staff is noticeably committed to creating a success-oriented experience for students as evidenced by the warm teacher-pupil relationship, the emphasis on individualized instruction, the absence of arbitrary universal standards, the problem-solving approach to discipline, and the general sense of joint effort observable both within the classroom and within the school as a whole. (Author/JF)

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A SCHOOL WITHOUT FAILURE:

A DESCRIPTION OF THE GLASSER APPROACH IN THE PALO ALTO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Presented at the
AMERICAN EDUCATION RESEARCH ASSOCIATION CONVENTION
New Orleans, Louisiana
February 25 - March 1, 1973

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EA 005 134

FOREWORD

In September, 1968, Superintendent of Schools Harold T. Santee, with full approval of the Board of Education, introduced Dr. William Glasser's Schools Without Failure approach at Ventura Elementary School in the Palo Alto Unified School District. Dr. Glasser's association with the Palo Alto Unified School District began some two years earlier when he was employed as a consultant. While Dr. Glasser had not yet published his book Schools Without Failure, the approaches to education he advocated during this consultantship period had many appealing features.

In the spring of 1968 the opportunity arose to systematically try these approaches through the employment of three Glasser-trained educators: a principal, Don O'Donnell, and two teachers, Keith Maxwell and William Trieglaff, Jr. Ventura School was selected as the experimental site. Two reasons led to this choice: the student population represented a broad range of abilities, socioeconomic, and ethnic backgrounds; and the teacher's approaches to education ranged from highly structured and traditional to permissive and unstructured. If the Glasser approach was to be of general utility, it must function with students of differing abilities. Likewise, it must have an impact on teachers with varying philosophies and teaching styles.

The application of the principles set forth by Dr. Glasser to an operating school was not without its problems. The community had to be convinced that the approach had merits, and then educated in what to expect from the schools. The staff had to be trained; while this was accomplished with varying degrees of success, no teacher, even those few who chose to transfer from Ventura

after only one year of experience there, failed to profit from the experience. Teaching techniques had to be tried; those that worked retained; those that did not, discarded. The students had to learn a whole new set of role expectations for the staff. As a result the operational program in 1972, while still adhering to the Schools Without Failure philosophy, is somewhat different from that of 1968. Perhaps 1971-72 can be said to truly be the first year of the Glasser approach at Ventura School. But already the staff is enthusiastically talking of changes they wish to make for 1972-73. But this is a dominant characteristic of the Ventura staff.

This paper is not the work of one author, but of many. Dr. Glasser's written words, and thoughts, certainly form the basis for much of what is put down here. Recognition must also be given to Dr. Patricia Engle, Miss Linda Thorne, and Ms. Beau Vallance Ristow who, at various times, were part of the research team who attempted to evaluate the program. Their words, and thoughts, likewise appear in the paper. But more than that are the interpretations, thoughts, and words of the present Ventura staff; candid, even sometimes irreverent, but always dedicated to the principles advocated by Dr. Glasser. Perhaps that is the crux of what the Glasser approach does for a school. From a beginning of two teachers and a principal (who has since departed) the entire staff has become almost fanatically dedicated to the students, school, and the concept of a "School Without Failure." Commitment is truly the watchword.

Palo Alto, California

July 1972

SCHOOLS WITHOUT FAILURE:

A SUMMARY OF "THE GLASSER APPROACH"

The preschool-age child lives in an environment largely devoid of labels, scoring categories, or other classification systems, allowing him to develop according to standards set by himself. In such an environment there is no such thing as a "failure". Everyday life experiences have no structures for pinning labels on individuals, they have no set standards to be met, they do not prescribe particular forms of thinking or select arbitrarily what is to be "learned" or committed to memory. The child when he enters school has spent five years exploring his surroundings, learning about them by solving the problems and questions which his environment poses, conducting inquiry into matters relevant to his own life. He has been more or less successful in these endeavors, depending on his home environment and the encouragement he receives from it, but it is through thinking problem-solving and dealing with matters relevant to his life that he has learned as much as he has. No one has ever labeled him a failure, for he has succeeded in doing all of the things which he set out to do, at varying levels of achievement: he <u>did</u> learn to button his jacket; he <u>did</u> find out what happens when a match is lit to paper; and it was difficult at first but he did learn what happens when he gets off a teeter-totter too soon. He would never consider himself a failure, and is quite confident that he is capable of success.

It is in this optimistic framework, maintains William Glasser in his book, <u>Schools Without Failure</u> (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), that most children begin their schooling experience: "Very few children come to school failures, none come labeled failures" (p. 26). And yet the pervading school mores

(based greatly on the expectations inherent in the normal curve) seem to demand that a certain percentage of children fall at the low end of the line. And so, a certain proportion do "fail". The teachers are not surprised -- they expect a certain percentage of failure. The tragedy is that after a period of acculturation, the pupils are not surprised either -- they become accustomed to being labeled, and grouped, even to the extent of being identified as "failures". For those who are identified as failures, the non-rewarding nature of their continuing experience with failure effectively lowers their motivation. If memorizing facts (a mental function which had little relevance for them before they came to school) seemed irrelevant at first, it seems doubly so even a little later, when it becomes apparent that the chances of succeeding are so clearly diminished. And the school, itself, becomes more irrelevant than before. Yet the children are obliged to enter into this environment every day; in defense against an environment which is clearly hostile to their interest, they withdraw, or they may break out into delinquent or otherwise aggressive behavior. "And delinquency and withdrawal lead to a failure identity" (p. 15). Children who experience failure early in school lock into a cycle of failure which becomes increasingly difficult to break out of. It becomes difficult to expect success in any realm of life.

It is these kinds of schooling experiences, according to Glasser's model, which are the primary cause of failure in children; the "Glasser approach" is an attempt to correct the deadening effect which these experiences have on so many children. Glasser builds his alternative, a "School Without Failure", on (a) an analysis of what children need in order to achieve a successful identity and (b) an examination of what school often does to children to teach them failure. We will describe each of these in some detail, since

much of what Glasser has to say about the positive development of children evolves gradually out of his hypotheses about children's needs and an evaluation of the negative aspects of traditional schooling.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SUCCESSFUL IDENTITY AND SOME EFFECTS OF SCHOOLING

The conceptual framework

> What made the child so successful and so optimistic prior to entering school? He was successful because he used his brain to solve problems relevant to his life; he was optimistic because he had a lot of fun. He discovered that, although reality may be harsh, he could find ways to cope with it, ways that were for the most part successful. Most important, however, even when he failed, he was not labeled a failure; one way or another, harshly or lovingly, he was shown a better way. (P. 29.)

Based on the experiences he describes in Reality Therapy Dr. William Glasser suggests two essential "pathways" to a successful identity: he maintains the success identity requires the fulfillment of the two basic needs, for self-worth and for love. While every experience the child encounters contributes variously to the realization or non-realization of these two needs, the school, because of the tremendously important role it plays in the child's everyday life, is critically involved with these aspects of his

development.

The need to feel worthwhile requires both knowledge and the ability to think -- it requires a certain feeling of competency and experience in dealing successfully with problems, and it therefore requires that the child be able to feel responsible for his success or for his failure by having sufficient knowledge to understand and deal with whatever situation he finds himself. Successful people, Glasser says, are able to rely upon reason and thinking to direct their behavior, they are able to see alternatives and to responsibly direct their mental abilities toward choosing between these alternatives; "people who fail", on the other hand, "fall back upon emotion to direct their behavior" (p. 20). The development of a feeling of self-esteem in children demands an environment in which the learning of skills and the exercise of critical thinking are applied to relevant problems in which the child is involved in a personal way with his daily experiences, and in an environment in which he feels responsible for, and committed to, his own learning.

There is some evidence suggesting that self-esteem increases with "academic achievement" as measured by grades and test scores; beyond this sort of correlation, however, Glasser relates self-worth to the intrinsically rewarding effects of solving problems ("problem-solving" is a term which assumes great importance in Glasser's model) and of using critical, creative thinking about relevant problems.

Dr. Glasser's book deals less explicitly with the development of the other "pathway" -- the need for love -- perhaps because so much of what he sees as necessary to the development of love is so inextricably tied in with the

development of a feeling of self-worth. The term "love" as used by Glasser carries a somewhat different connotation than in common usage. By "love" Glasser means a feeling of responsibility for and involvement in the activities and concerns of others -- that is, a responsible participatory relationship with the human environment, a committed and caring involvement. This is, of course, the essence of love.

The need for love (giving and receiving) is properly a function of the child's home and social environment and grows out of his interactions with others -- with parents, other adults, and peers. "If he succeeds in giving and receiving love, and can do so with some consistency throughout his life, he is to some degree a success" (p. 12), he has at least a partial "success identity" and learns to expect positive things from his interactions with the world. Although traditionally the school has not concerned itself (at least not officially) with this sort of affective education, the experience with central-city school children has shown that many children "need affection desperately" when they arrive in school, and the schools cannot afford to ignore the role they play in affective development. In a sense the schools can hardly avoid having an impact (positive or negative) on this aspect of the child's development -- schooling is a social situation and one whose social relationships and rules dominate the child's life for a good part of his day. The extent to which this network of social relationships and mutual obligations reinforces or discourages the child's feelings of involvement with other people will have a great effect on his identification of himself as a success or a failure -- loneliness and isolation are critical characteristics of the failing individual, and "education for social responsibility should be a part of every school program" (p. 14). Glasser's concept of love as personal

and social responsibility/involvment is closely related to the development of self-esteem, and although the two pathways are treated separately by him it is clear that the full development of one of them necessarily implies the full development of the other. We will be focusing largely on self-esteem in this presentation because its prerequisites (knowledge and thinking) are traditionally the concerns of the school, but the role of "love" in Glasser's model should not be underestimated.

What school does to children

Glasser's model of the development of a success identity is based on his description of what schooling does to children. The description represents his account of a traditionally failure-oriented school and is drawn largely from his experiences with central-city schooling conditions. The reader should understand, then, that while the characterization of traditional "failure" schools tends to present all schools as similar, this portrait represents a selection of Glasser's part in the interests of simplicity and clarity: while some of his generalizations are valid and useful, we do not mean to imply that this caricature could be a description of any one school. Certainly some of the elements of schooling presented here are present in many schools -- even in Palo Alto, but the scheme is condensed (and thereby intensified) in order to present more clearly the negative aspects of schooling. It should be emphasized as well that the description which follows is entirely Glasser's view: it is <u>not</u> PAUSD's view of "schooling here or elsewhere. It is a selected and condensed view of some of the ways in which schooling might be affecting children.

It is with the first component of the success identity -- the need for self-worth -- that the schools have traditionally been concerned, for (Glasser says) one cannot achieve a feeling of self-esteem without knowledge and the ability to think; Glasser admits that theoretically the schools do tackle this aspect of development, but feels that they do so in a way which is completely antithetical to developing any real "thinking" ability and thus antithetical to the development of self-esteem. The school's traditional approach to learning and to the acquisition of "knowledge" is a failure-oriented approach in two senses: first, schools actively anticipate failure by some children by seeing failure as a normal and expected event, and secondly (but not entirely independently of the first), the methods used in the classroom cause children to fail.

Glasser faults schooling on many fronts, charging (rather broadly) that "it is school and school alone which pins the label of failure on children" (p. 26) and that it does so in countless insidious ways which are crucial largely because school uses methods which are not applicable in any other realm of the social environment. We may classify the failure-oriented approaches of school identified by Glasser under three headings: learning procedures, evaluation procedures, and discipline and interpersonal relations. Each of these components plays a particular role in identifying a child as a failure; each does so by variously undermining the development of self-esteem.

1. Learning

The grossest and most basic threat to a success identity, Glasser maintains, is school's emphasis on memory and rote learning. The kind of mental growth

required for a success identity is critical thinking, the ability to give a reasonable opinion on alternative solutions to problems. But, particularly since Sputnik, schools have emphasized "knowledge-gathering and remembering" (p. 53); education emphasizes memorization, a "lesser function of the human brain", to the neglect of critical thinking. Thinking (or problem-solving), insofar as it is taught in schools, is directed mainly to problems which have specifiable answers, i.e., math and science. Our schools are dominated by the "certainty principle", the myth that there is a right answer to everything. "Using the brain as a memory bank" does not give a feeling of personal responsibility in learning and cannot lead to a success identity.

Another negative factor in the school's approach to learning, according to this view, is the irrelevance of most of this learning to the child's life: learning deals with the memorization of facts which have no bearing on the child's own problems and teaches skills which themselves appear to be removed from reality (reading, for example, is often seen by children as something one does only in school). The schools "fail to teach the child how he can relate (his) learning to his life outside school" (p. 50), and school becomes an end in itself, quite apart from everyday reality.

Thirdly, Glasser suggests that homework imposed on the student is too often tedious and irrelevant. Parents themselves reinforce this tendency, as they tend to equate good teaching with assigning much work at home, but Glasser criticizes the schools for assigning too much homework to young children who are unable to see the meaning of it and who do not yet have sufficient skills to gain anything from independent study. "As with many habits forcibly acquired too early, the later result is an aversion to important, necessary homework, homework that is accepted when the more mature child can see the

sense in what he is asked to do" (p. 73). Homework, too, tends to be geared to the A and B students since the poorer students usually don't do it; this accentuates the gap between successes and failures. The problem is further aggravated in central-city areas or other environments where the home situation is clearly not conducive to effective study.

2. Evaluation procedures

The whole set of assumptions lying behind the normal curve can have a serious effect on students' learning and classroom performance. The normal curve anticipates a large proportion of "average" performances, with small groups of above- and below-average scores at either end; typically schoolwork is evaluated on this basis. By definition some must fall at the bottom end, relative to the other student's performance. Thus even on a task where all students do well, some will necessarily do less well than others. Labels indicating a greater or lesser degree of failure are attached to these students, regardless of how far the curve was "raised". In addition to this basic flaw of the normal curve, Glasser faults this evaluation model for encouraging only the most superficial evaluation of (and therefore involvement with) students on the part of the teacher: where it suffices to assign a pupil a score and indicate his position on the curve by a letter grade, the teacher need not become involved with the child to any greater degree than this. This lack of personal involvement on the teacher's part is easily communicable as a sense of lessened responsibility and involvement affecting both teacher and pupil.

The second criticism of evaluation procedures is closely related to this; objective testing itself subsumes a a number of evils which tend to produce

a failure identity. Objective tests are geared only to locating correct responses to problems which have "right" answers; they leave out entirely the domain of problems which have no single right answer. And aren't most of the real world problems in this domain? Is there a single "right" answer to how to control overpopulation, or how to cure racial prejudice, or raise a child? Glasser maintains objective tests discourage thinking and the investigation of the unknown; emphasizing only the importance of facts. Further, closed book exams perpetrate the fallacy that knowledge or facts remembered are more important than knowledge looked up or searched out.

Grades pose their own special set of failure-oriented problems, indeed "probably the school practice that most produces failure in students is grading" (p. 59). Some of the problems with grading have been acknowledged at upper levels of education and many colleges have abolished the system altogether, but in the public schools grading remains firmly entrenched; "in elementary school, grades set the stage for early failure" (p. 59). Originally conceived as an objective measure of performance, grades have become almost more important than education itself -- children will report that they are working "for good grades", and as bad grades come to be associated with bad behavior grades become moral equivalents. The grading system with its emphasis on objective "knowledge" and the threat of falling at the low end of the curve demands that the student choose between thinking and getting good grades, since he cannot normally do both. Grades contribute more than anything else to the "failure" label, for they are a permanent record and can be damning for life -- they can discourage high ambitions and block entry to more relevant education later.

3. School organization and disciplinary control

The structure of social and academic control imposed by the schools is conducive to failure in several ways. The practice of homogeneous classes and ability grouping are the most visible of these, for "slow learners and failure-identity students are grouped together, associating primarily with each other and deprived of both the motivational model of successful students and the chance to learn from them. Ability grouping insidiously affects teachers by leading them to expect poor performance by the "below-average" classes -- a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy operates to reinforce the failure syndrome. Similarly, selecting our poorer students for "remedial" work overtly labels them, segregating them and effectively lowering their motivation to learn by telling them (in effect) that they can expect to have more difficulty than other students.

The traditional disciplinary structure is another crucial aspect which is conducive to failure. In most schools the child is not given responsibility for his own behavior: external evaluations and imposed rules tend to locate the source of control outside of himself and cloud his ability to see what the real consequences of his behavior are; he learns not to feel responsible for either his good or his bad behavior -- his sense of self-esteem is necessarily lessened. Furthermore, because his behavior is controlled by regulations and assignments imposed on him by the teacher from above, his opportunity for involvement both with the teacher and in his own plans is extremely low. If he is not involved in making his own decisions relevant to his proper interests, his commitment to schooling tasks will be low. Both his self-esteem and his sense of responsibility and mutual involvement suffer in consequence.

Schooling, then, according to Glasser is traditionally a failure-oriented

experience. Schools do reward success and encourage it, but everything in the learning situation, in the grading and evaluation procedures and in the sorts of organization and control imposed by schooling implies that there cannot be successes in school without some failures as well; success is only relative. Students are evaluated against one another (a competition which reduces their involvement in and love -- responsibility -- for one another) on tasks which downgrade the very thought processes and problem-solving experiences which are so crucial to a feeling of responsibility, involvement, and relevance, and thus to feelings of both love and self-worth. Children who are loved and who receive considerable support from home are able to survive in this system (sometimes), but countless others give up early, labeled as failures in a nonsupportive and irrelevant schooling environment, rarely experiencing the feeling of success which would provide a stimulus to real learning. They withdraw, or they rebel openly, but they continue to fail.

At this point it is important to offer a general statement that in the Palo Alto Unified School District, conditions as a whole do not fit into the simplified model offered by Glasser. Palo Alto schools are a far cry from the central-city model from which he developed his view of schooling, and it is crucial that we indicate this is true. It is, therefore, important to recognize that this evaluation involves special contributions which a Glasser-model "success" school can have within a system which is already a far cry from the failure oriented schools Glasser describes in his book.

SCHOOLS WITHOUT FAILURE: AN ALTERNATIVE

Since school is the major arena in which "failures" develop and are nourished, schools are in a powerful position to reverse the cycle. They can do this,

Glasser maintains, by providing a supportive and success-oriented environment. The everyday life of the school is of critical importance: the schools cannot correct any of the deficiencies in the child's background, but they can make the crucial 6 to 7 hours a day over which they have control an enriching and positive experience, they can contribute strongly to the development of a success identity. Glasser recommends working within the existing structure of the schools, urging pervasive, penetrating reforms. His key concept in this reform is involvement, on every level: the failing child is one who withdraws into a personal isolation and loneliness, and his loneliness can be greatly reduced in a caring atmosphere which encourages him to be responsible and which increases his sense of self-esteem. Glasser's goal is to increase the child's sense of worthwhileness by manipulating the schooling experience to increase his own responsibility for his behavior. This involves increasing the child's ability to think critically and to guide his own behavior according to realistic standards set by himself -- standards which he can meet.

Glasser would increase involvement in the learning process, first of all, by focusing on learning which requires thinking and problem-solving. Schools should de-emphasize the memorization function and select learning activities which, through active involvement on the part of both teacher and student, encourage critical, creative thinking about problems relevant to home, school, and to the child's own expanding world.

Toward this end, Glasser introduces the idea of the "class meeting", a daily discussion-in-the-round in which each child can express his opinions in a cooperative and non-judgmental problem-solving situation. Class meetings can be of three types: 1) social problem-solving meetings (dealing with immediate disciplinary problems or classroom policy issues), 2) open-ended

meetings (dealing with anything of interest; "free discussion" learning situations); or 3) educational-diagnostic meetings (which function like an oral exam, giving the teacher an opportunity to evaluate but encouraging pupils to use judgment and give reasoned opinions). Secondly, the learning atmosphere should include useful and relevant skills which can be applied to further learning ("knowledge" of facts should be downplayed, especially at the elementary levels); reading is the most important of these and should be taught in homogeneous non-competitive groups using materials of interest to the pupils in an effort to close the gap between school and reality.

Students should be encouraged to approach problems which have no "right" answer, to deal critically with alternatives, to think about relevant questions. Glasser feels that controversial issues in political or social questions have been too long ignored by the schools and that this avoidance of the realistic complexities of our times is only aggravating the conflict between school and reality; he encourages training students in using reason and in dealing with a variety of complex alternatives.

Learning can be made more relevant in another way (and can contribute to the teachers' own sense of involvement in the experience) through "enrichment" programs (crafts and the development of the children's special interests) and through periods where teachers can engage in what Glasser calls "strength teaching" by offering occasional classes in their own fields of expertise. Enrichment teaching and strength teaching can bring the school more in line with real-life interests, and they can be wholly success-oriented and supportive situations.

Since failing can never be a motivating influence, any tendencies to assign this label to children should be avoided. Glasser recommends instead the diagnostic use of regular oral and written assignments where each student is evaluated against a standard set for him by the teacher (and preferably jointly) and not against the rest of the class. An evaluation taking the form of written reports and parent conferences should encourage deeper involvement and commitment between teachers and students, making schooling a more personal experience. Evaluation practices would vary by grade level: Glasser recommends written reports at the elementary level, and a pass-no credit system in high schools, in both instances offering the opportunity to aim for one "S" (superior) grade per term so that students wishing to undertake additional responsibility and effort could be rewarded for doing so. Evaluation should be student-oriented, and should not be a means of locating expected failures.

Finally, as concerns discipline and control: students should be led to understand that rewards they receive are consequences of their own behavior, and not of an impersonal evaluation system -- this awareness and sense of responsibility should foster an internal "locus of control", with the child's perceiving that he has control over the good and bad events which occur, that he is responsible for his performance and is worth something as an individual. Rules should be established as much as possible on a mutual basis between student and teacher -- they should be reasonable, agreed upon by the students, and then consistently enforced: consistency indicates that the teacher has a commitment to the agreement, that the teacher cares whether the student lives up to the standards he has set for himself.

> To help a presently failing child to success, we must get him to make a value judgment about what he is doing that is contributing to his failure. If he doesn't believe that what he is doing is contributing to his failure, if he believes his behavior is all right, no one can change the child now. He must then suffer the consequences of his refusal to change his behavior. Neither school nor therapist should attempt to manipulate the world so that the child does not suffer the reasonable consequences of his behavior.

Disciplinary as well as "academic" problems, then, should be handled not on a punitive basis but on an involved and problem-solving basis. Through a sequence of interactions between teacher and child, the student's sense of responsibility is gradually built, along with a sense of group responsibility.

This emphasis on reasoned interpersonal communication, on personal involvement and commitment between teacher and pupil and between pupils is one of the basic tenets of Glasser's alternative model. He feels that it is only through a sense of mutual obligation, of joint effort and joint commitment, that responsibility -- and therefore love and self-worth -- can grow. And it is toward fostering this atmosphere of mutual obligation that his organizational and disciplinary reforms are directed. Consistent with this is his insistence on heterogeneous classes, on <u>not</u> segregating for failure, on keeping channels of communication open between all participants in the school environment. Tutoring programs, also, can encourage this sense of involvement between students.

This, then, somewhat cursorily, is "the Glasser method". The aim is to develop a supportive, involving and relevant educational experience which will encourage success by making education rewarding in its own right. The schools are in a unique position to foster a success identity in every child; because they are a regular and permanent feature in the child's life, they can provide a rich and rewarding environment. By making the child an active participant in learning, a school without failure can contribute greatly to his development as a self-esteeming and confident individual.

It is toward this end that Ventura School was re-organized along Glasser lines beginning four years ago. And in order to more fully understand the research data presented later in this report, a brief description of Ventura School and its day-to-day operation may be helpful.

VENTURA SCHOOL AS A SUCCESS ENVIRONMENT:
AN INTRODUCTION

Ventura School serves 275 pupils in grades kindergarten through six in the South Palo Alto area roughly bound by El Camino, Park Avenue, Whitclem Drive and Lambert. The school was built in 1953, with additions in 1955 and 1956, and architecturally is identical to numerous other schools in the Palo Alto Unified School District built during the same period; the school is an L-shaped one-story building of green stucco, with classrooms opening to the inside of the L on to covered outdoor corridors furnished with sturdy picnic-type lunch tables. The play area is large and grassy, bounded on two sides by the L of the building and separated from the surrounding residential streets by a high link fence. All classrooms are identical in physical lay-out, and the order is deliberately scrambled so that primary and intermediate grade classrooms are physically adjacent; administrative offices and teachers' lounge are located in the central portion of the structure. The building itself is virtually unchanged since its construction nearly twenty years ago; no architectural or other structural concessions were made with the adoption of the new instructional program, and all innovations in curricular organization and teaching style are implemented within this traditional physical setting.

The full-time staff consists of a principal, a secretary, a clerk typist, custodian and 12 full-time teachers; 1971-72 marks the first school year since the new program began that the entire staff is actively committed to working within the model. Three of the teachers had had experience with the original Glasser-model school in Sacramento; a number of the other teachers had experience with the Glasser approach in previous years; the remainder of the current teaching staff had been teachers elsewhere (within the Palo Alto Unified School District or outside) and requested assignment at Ventura. The

principal comes from within the district, having been principal at Addison School before coming to Ventura in 1971.

In addition to the full-time teaching staff, there is a large body of auxiliary teaching personnel, including paid consultants and community volunteers and totalling "about 130" over the course ofyear. These include a 1/2 time reading and math consultant, a 2/5 time psychologist, a 2/5 time nurse, full-time learning assistant teacher, 3/5 time librarian, 4/5 time speech clinician, about 40 high school students who volunteer as tutors, and a number of community people and parents who volunteer their time.

The pupil population served by Ventura is atypical of the Palo Alto Unified School District student population as a whole, representing generally a lower socioeconomic level and a broader ethnic mix. A social class survey made in 1971 (PAUSD Research Report No. 126, Feb. 1972) looked at the educational and occupational levels of parents district-wide, combining the two criteria to produce an index of five social classes (Hollingshead Social Class Index) in gradations from upper-middle (major professionals with advanced degrees: Class I) to working class (Classes IV and V). On this index, 44% of the total Palo Alto Unified School District parent population falls into Class I; for Ventura this proportion is only 18%, with the bulk of families (76%) falling in the middle three classes. (See Table I in the Appendices for further information). Thus, while Ventura does <u>not</u> represent a cross-section of Palo Alto Unified School District families, it should be stressed here that Palo Alto itself is highly atypical of the nation in socioeconomic terms; Ventura, then, probably comes closer to the national profile than does the district. It is important to bear this fact in mind, for Glasser's reality therapy model was developed within an SES context considerably lower

than that of Palo Alto, and any evaluation of the success of the Schools Without Failure methods must take into account the nature of the target population. Racially, too, the Ventura student body differs from the district average: 22% of Ventura pupils are black (district average: 4%), 9% are Oriental (district: 4%), and 13% are Spanish Surname (district: 3%). The neighborhood served by Ventura is relatively transient, producing a pupil turnover rate of about 24% per year, about the same as the Palo Alto Unified School District average.

Ventura, in its role as "model school" and Northern California Educators Training Center, frequently arranged observation days for organized visits by persons from outside the district; during the 1971-72 school year, in excess of 2000 persons visited the school. Ventura teachers seem to accept this as a way of life and are extremely amenable to having visitors wander in and out of the classroom, seemingly in no way disturbed or disrupted by the presence of these outsiders. These visitors are, in fact, welcomed by the teachers and barely even noticed by the pupils.

The classrooms at Ventura are relaxed and comfortable and, within the uniform architecture of the rooms, the physical arrangement seems completely individualized and fluid; no two classrooms are organized in quite the same way. In no instance are the desks arranged in the traditional front-facing rows (a unanimity not found in other PAUSD schools), nor are accessories arranged in a fixed way: bookshelves and work tables are used to create alcoves and room divisions, and pupils' desks are arranged either in a large circle or in various small group patterns facing each other. Some classes have sofas or comfortable chairs, and nearly all have a large rug somewhere in the room; "science tables", easels, reading corners, math work tables and the like may be anywhere. There is an abundance of student art work and student-decorated

bulletin boards, pets in cages, evidence of porjects in progress. One gets no sense whatever of regimentation or rigidity in the arrangement of the rooms, but rather relaxed, stimulating, and even somewhat cluttered. The physical layout facilitates interaction and group learning; the rooms are clearly not arranged for the purposes of large group instruction.

The atmosphere is usually one of quiet involvement. The instruction tends to be individualized. The school day is roughly divided by subjects but within this structure the children appear to be working at their own pace, using different workbooks and materials, finishing assignments and going on at their own rate. Children work quietly at their desks and the teacher's role, while always active, is directed to very small groups or to individuals as they come to her/him for help: a common pattern in many classrooms is for the teacher to remain at her desk during work periods, available as a resource person when needed. A number of the teachers operate with the contract system in which the teacher and child make a (written or verbal) agreement as to what the child will complete during that period. Not all instruction is so individualized, and occasionally it is necessary for the teacher to give a "lesson" to the class as a whole (especially in math skills), but individualized instruction and individualized "assignments" appear to be the rule. There are no class assignments written on the board, no instructions to the whole class regarding the next task, no group tests at the end of a "lesson."

These observations hold true in all Ventura classrooms; they contrast sharply with the situation in other PAUSD schools in which, despite wide variations in teaching style and teacher-pupil rapport, one typically finds homework assignments posted (by chapter, page number, problem set and the like), or teachers administering spelling tests to a whole class, allowing 5 minutes to complete a set of problems writteon the board or

other evidence of teacher control of the learning situation. Typically in PAUSD schools, the teachers set standards for the class as a whole and tend to instruct the class as a body, offering individual help but expecting each student to perform at some set level. The difference at Ventura in this respect is remarkable.

Quite striking too is the warmth and personableness of teacher-pupil relationships at Ventura. First to be noted is that, contrary to the situation one commonly finds in other schools, the imperative or command speech form is virtually never used. Verbal interactions are of a reasoned give-and-take nature, and the teacher-pupil relationship appears to be one of caring and awareness of common effort. There is a great deal of interaction between teacher and pupils, and the barrier between teacher-up-front and a mass of obedient pupils is not apparent; pupils feel free with teachers, relaxed, bantering sometimes or open with questions or complaints, and problems are worked out individually. Teachers tend to treat students' problems as legitimate and work them out not by a rigid application of rules but on an individual and problem-solving basis. Possibly one reflection of this sort of feeling is that the children at Ventura seem accepting of adults; they do not seem surprised to find strangers in the room and feel very free to come to them for help in their work. Students are free, too, to enter the teachers' lounge, and there is considerable traffic through that area every morning. In all these respects the situation at Ventura is unlike that in other PAUSD schools -- teacher-pupil relationships may be warm and relaxed, but typically the teacher wields authority in a very unequivocal way, issuing commands, establishing rules and applying them universally; in most traditional schools one does not sense (at least not so uniformly) the same respect for pupil-as-individual-with-own-problems which is so typical of the Ventura style.

This last point relates closely to the question of discipline both within the classroom framework and on an individual problem basis; in both situations the Ventura style differs from the traditional, and both are important to evaluating the effect of the Glasser-model emphasis on internal control. Concerning the classroom situation: although commands or orders are never given, classes are generally quiet, orderly, and industrious, with an apparent minimum of wasted or bored "free time." The harried teacher trying to keep control of a class by imposing busy-work or by constantly calling the class to attention is antithetical to the Ventura style -- missing is the rigid silence and bored fidgeting of strict obedience common to so many teacher-dominated classrooms. Rather, the sense of order and direction in Ventura classrooms emerges from the spirit of involvement by the pupils in their work or in small group situations. Individualized instruction would seem to preclude both the frustration and the boredom so often resulting from teacher-imposed learning drills. Regarding individual disciplinary instances: it cannot be said that any pupil at Ventura is explicitly "disciplined" by a teacher in the traditional sense of the teacher's invoking and applying a rule solely for the sake of obedience; the pupil's role in correcting behavior patterns is always an active and not a passive one. Children are not told to do or not to do something. Teachers are consistent in applying the Glasser problem-solving model, in which the child is asked to acknowledge what he is doing, then to evaluate whether what he is doing is really a helpful action, and if not, what he could do to change it. Reasonableness and a relevance of the disciplinary technique to the particular situation seem to predominate. Discipline is personalized and oriented more toward helping the pupil understand his actions and correct them himself than to maintaining an imposed order.

Pupil-pupil interactions within the classroom are numerous and generally non-disruptive, appearing to be of a cooperative nature. Peer tutoring is a device encouraged by many of the teachers, and pupils are often seen working in pairs or small groups. This pattern contrasts somewhat with the typical pattern in other PAUSD schools in which both the physical arrangement of the rooms and the teacher's established position of sole authority preclude students working together at their own pace.

Class meetings are held daily by most teachers, at regular times and generally during the half hour preceding or following the morning recess. Usually the students form their own circle on the large rug, though in some classes desks are arranged in a circle and in these cases they remain at their seats. Teachers may specifically arrange the pupils (for example, alternating sex, or separating rambunctious pupils), others simply allow the circle to form itself; in cases where readjustments must be made during the meeting, these are effected quietly and non-punitively. Attendance at class meetings is mandatory -- all students must be present in the circle, though no one is forced to actively participate in the discussion; students appear to look forward to the meetings. The teacher occupies an egalitarian position in the circle, and asks the opening question, which typically is one designed to bring an "involving" response on the students' part (e.g., a show of hands); this is followed by questions designed to elicit "personalization" by each student (i.e., giving personal examples). The teacher's role remains active but not dominant, guiding the discussion, asking challenging questions, eliciting responses from as many students as possible. The teacher is never (well, rarely), judgmental, never (rarely) criticizes students' remarks (though she may attempt to elicit opposing opinions from others), is accepting and encouraging of what each pupil says. Her role is that of interested but

impartial moderator. Class meetings last about a half-hour in the intermediate grades, less in the primary grades; the participation rate is high, the meetings are lively but not chaotic -- hand-raising before speaking is typically enforced, and the result is usually what appears to be a very rational and orderly discussion.

Twice a year a one week, one hour a day enrichment program of crafts and "extra learnings" takes place; students prepare for the program well in advance, with student representatives from each class working together to draw up a list of courses desired; students then sign up for classes by listing three preferences and the reasons for them. Each class has about a dozen students, generally of mixed ages, and sessions are held in classrooms, outdoors, under the veranda, or wherever possible. Classes included macrame, woodcarving, science experiments, bread baking, weaving, cycling, and trampoline and are taught by the regular staff and by volunteers from the community. The atmosphere during enrichment periods is generally festive and busy, and enthusiasm seemed high.

Significantly, the teacher-pupil relationship at Ventura is remarkably similar in many ways from one classroom to another. Although there is a rich variety of both teaching methods and classroom organization (i.e., in the use of tutors, reliance on project approaches, use of contract system, seating arrangements, choice of textbooks and supplementary materials, etc.), there is a very clear sense of coordination underlying this diversity: common to all of the teachers at Ventura is a very personalized and aware involvement with each pupil and his progress; disciplinary problems are handled in the same reasoned problem-solving way by all teachers; commands are not issued; the rooms are uniformly comfortable and unregimented. This degree of commonality

contrasts noticeably with the situation in other schools, where teachers often are free to adopt quite different teaching styles and degrees of personal involvement with pupils, ranging from a warm open classroom approach to a rigidly ordered traditional classroom arrangement. Although there are cases of team teaching and paired classrooms, with two or more teachers working together to develop a coherent style, the typical PAUSD elementary school is a collection of more or less independent classroom units relatively uncoordinated with each other. There is not the same evidence of school-wide coordination that one senses at Ventura. The situation at Ventura appears to be unique.

A salient feature of the Ventura teachers is the virtually unqualified enthusiasm which they express. Their feelings about both the philosophy behind the Glasser method and its effectiveness in application are overwhelmingly positive. Most teachers at Ventura have previously worked under more traditional programs and they are aware of, and articulate about, the differences between traditional approaches and the Glasser model. They readily argue that "this is not the only way to go", but most feel that the Glasser approach is the best and most clearly articulated method which they have worked under thus far. Although questions and uncertainties about interpretations in specific cases often arise, spontaneous criticism of the program is difficult to elicit. The only consistent negative evaluation offered is that the program is very difficult to operate when the teaching staff is not in 100% agreement as to its validity. Significantly, this is the first year that this degree of accord has existed at Ventura.

The positive aspect of the program most frequently mentioned by teachers is the sense of involvement which the Glasser model encourages -- teachers

stress the importance of the personal involvement they feel with their pupils, stating that while this in itself is not a novel goal, the Glasser model offers a clear and systematic method for achieving and maintaining it. Teachers report that students work well, honor the commitments which they make with themselves and with the teacher, and are able to make responsible decisions as to how much they can expect to accomplish in a given period of time. The staff attributes these effects largely to the feeling of mutual respect and positive expectation which the reality therapy approach demands. Furthermore, several teachers report that they themselves feel freer under this system than in traditional teaching situations -- many consider that the "old style of teaching" placed them in an uncomfortably authoritarian position where the main task was to maintain order and to develop one teaching style which hopefully would "reach" as many of the class as possible. The awareness that a non-individualized, universal approach must necessarily "miss" a number of students produce considerable frustration and an awareness of unfortunate waste and inefficiency -- Ventura teachers contrast this situation with the Glasser model in which they feel freer, more relaxed, more satisfied that they are reaching every child in a positive way. The heightened sense of personal involvement seems to be a consistent feature of a teacher's experience at Ventura, and it is very highly valued.

Teachers' perceptions of students' relations with each other are fairly uniform. Most stress the greater degree of "fluidity" among the students, the fact that the de-emphasis on competitiveness means that the school is less "cliquish" than most. Ventura students appear to be more "honest" in their relationships with each other; what social ostracism there is is generally not on the basis of physical appearance or other arbitrary criteria ("no kid is ever made fun of for being fat"), and students "deal with people realistically." Pupil interactions tend to be helping ones.

Teachers perceive that children use physical contact quite a bit to express positive feelings about each other but that in aggressive situations students tend to be less physical and more verbal than most. Teachers attribute this development to the children's experience with the problem-solving model particularly as it is applied in class meetings and in disciplinary situations.

Finally, it is very important to note that Ventura teachers value their relationship with each other very highly. The sense of interpersonal involvement and honesty is an extremely important feature of staff interactions -- this is clear from conversations with the teachers and from the kind of conversations in the teachers' lounge but is most apparent in the staff meeting situations. It is important to mention this here because the pattern differs so drastically from the usual staff-meeting approach typical of other schools. Ventura staff meetings (weekly, on Tuesday afternoons) are held on the class-meeting model -- that is, as problem-solving and/or open-ended meetings in the round, with principal, teachers and occasional auxiliary personnel present. The meetings deal with philosophical and policy matters affecting the school as a whole, and serve as a forum for raising questions having to do with interpretations of the Glasser theory in the classroom. Frequently they provide an opportunity for the core of more experienced "Glasser teachers" to present the model in broad outline and for the staff to raise questions. Discussions about particular problems or misunderstandings are frank and direct; teachers ask for help and clarification from the rest of the staff, and evaluations and suggestions are direct and supportive. There is a very noticeable sense of cooperation, of joint effort and mutual respect on the part of the whole professional staff. Meetings are give-and-take situations, discussion oriented, and are generally not dominated by any one personality. In this respect the feeling at Ventura is distinctly different from that at many other PAUSD schools, where staff meetings are generally administrative affairs in which the principal

dispenses information and tends to various mechanical and official organizational duties, and teachers retain a relatively passive and non-contributory role. The special sort of cooperative professional relationship among the Ventura staff is critical to the success of the program, for there is a strong sense among the teachers there that the Glasser program cannot succeed without full commitment by the staff; this commitment demands the same sort of involvement and mutual problem-solving on the part of the teachers that the classroom situation itself reflects.

In summary, the learning environment at Ventura School is in many respects unique even within the generally flexible and innovative structure of the PAUSD elementary school system. Although in some superficial ways Ventura falls very close to the district norm (e.g., physical layout, size, pupil-teacher ratio), the school's conversion to the Glasser plan four years ago has produced some very noticeable and significant changes in the social and interpersonal features of the environment it provides both teachers and students. The staff's commitment to creating a success oriented experience for students is apparent in the warm teacher-pupil relationships, in the emphasis on individualized instruction, in the absence of arbitrary universal standards, in the problem-solving approach to discipline, in the degree of cooperative pupil-pupil relationships encouraged in instructional situations, in the corresponding absence of competitiveness in the classroom, and in the general sense of joint effort observable both within the classroom and within the school as a whole. Ventura is different. It remains now to be seen whether these careful and consistent differences produce any long lasting noticeable effects on student behavior and achievement.